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CONVERGENCE OF ADVERTISING MESSAGES WITH AGENTIC AND COMMUNAL SELF-PERCEPTION IN CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING: AN INTRODUCTORY STUDY

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Abstract

Background and Objective: The duality of human self-perception—agentic versus communal—plays a pivotal role in consumer decision-making. This introductory study investigates how the alignment between an individual's dominant self-perception and advertising content influences emotional reactions and product preferences. The aim is to explore whether self-congruity enhances receptivity to marketing messages and brand evaluations.

Study Design / Materials and Methods: A structured individual survey was conducted with 12 Polish participants divided by age and gender. Each respondent completed a validated Agency and Communion Orientation Scale and evaluated four advertisements representing either communal or agentic values (Nike, Adidas, Chevrolet, Volkswagen). Emotional and cognitive responses were assessed via a 7-point Likert scale.

Results: A convergence between the participants' self-perception and their preferences for brand and product messaging was observed in 10 out of 12 and 9 out of 12 cases, respectively. Respondents with a communal orientation preferred advertisements with inclusive, socially-driven narratives, while agentic individuals showed stronger affinity toward content emphasizing independence and achievement. Emotional alignment with the advertising style reinforced positive impressions.

Practical Implications: Understanding self-congruity effects enables marketers to craft more targeted and psychologically resonant campaigns. Aligning message framing with self-perception traits can improve brand engagement, emotional resonance, and potentially guide consumer choices.

Conclusion and Summary: The findings support the role of self-congruity in consumer perception and highlight its potential as a strategic lever in marketing communication. Further

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research with larger and culturally diverse samples is recommended to validate and extend these findings.

Keywords: consumer behaviour, agency, communion, self-congruity effect, advertising, emotional response

JEL Classification: M31, M37

Paper Type: Research Study

1. Introduction

Marketing today offers increasing opportunities, making accurate audience segmentation less problematic. However, terms like agency and communion still emerge as relatively new concepts in various industries, offering significant potential for effective consumer engagement. This research examines the relationship between an individual's self-concept and how marketing content (advertising) aligns with that self-image, focusing on the impact of self-congruity in marketing decisions.

The duality of agency and communion plays a critical role in social perception and marketing. Understanding how these psychological dimensions influence consumer behaviour is essential for reaching the right audience effectively and for developing targeted marketing strategies that resonate with potential customers. In the context of contemporary marketing, self-perception plays a strategic role in segmentation and communication design (Mazurek-Łopacińska, 2021).

Consumers are not just buying products based on functional attributes; they are also purchasing based on how those products align with their personal identity and values. This idea, known as the **self-congruity effect**, suggests that products that reflect a consumer's self-image are more likely to be purchased. Previous studies have shown that consumers are more likely to form lasting relationships with brands whose values align with their own, leading to brand loyalty and long-term engagement (Giacomin & Jordan, 2017).

In this study, the **convergence mechanism** between agency and communion in self-concept and how it relates to consumer choice is analysed. The research aims to test the hypothesis that aligning marketing messages with consumers' self-image can influence decision-making and consumer behaviour, especially when targeting distinct consumer segments based on their agentic or communal traits.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the design and execution of the study:

1. To what extent does the alignment between an individual's dominant self-perception (agentic or communal) and the values presented in advertising influence brand and product preferences?

2. Are emotional responses to advertising affected by the degree of self-congruity?
3. How does self-congruity with advertising content vary across age and gender groups?

2. Literature Review

Bakan (1966) introduced the duality of human nature in the context of individual interests, which became foundational in understanding consumer behaviour. This theory underpins many psychological constructs, including agency, which refers to task accomplishment and goal achievement, and communion, which involves social relationships and care for others.

The agency-communion framework has been widely applied in social psychology and marketing. Agency focuses on self-expression and dominance, with key attributes such as independence and achievement. In contrast, communion is rooted in empathy, cooperation, and emotional connection with others (Abele, 2022; Wojciszke, 2009). These dimensions help define how individuals relate to others and perceive brands, which has crucial implications for consumer choices.

Self-congruity, or the alignment between one's self-image and a brand's image, has been studied extensively in marketing (Sirgy, 1982). Brands with images that align with consumers' self-concept tend to evoke stronger emotional connections and higher purchase intentions. This phenomenon underscores the importance of matching marketing messages with the personality traits of target consumers (Hryniewicz, 2022).

Recent Developments in Self-Congruity and Consumer Behavior (2019–2024)

Recent studies have expanded the understanding of self-congruity by incorporating cultural, emotional, and digital dimensions. For instance, Entringer, Gebauer, and Paulhus (2022) demonstrated how agency and communion are embedded in the Big Five personality framework, reinforcing the role of these dimensions in consumer profiling. Korlat et al. (2021) examined how adolescent self-perceptions shaped their responses to socially constructed roles, underlining the influence of early self-construal on future consumption patterns. In marketing contexts, Hryniewicz (2022) confirmed that communal advertising tends to generate more positive emotional responses than agentic ones, particularly when the advertisement aligns with consumers' dominant self-traits.

Moreover, new research has explored how self-congruity manifests in digital environments. Pietraszkiewicz et al. (2018) used natural language processing to map agency and communion traits across online content, suggesting that brands can algorithmically target audiences based on linguistic cues. Collectively, these findings highlight the relevance of self-congruity in today's personalized marketing land-

scape and justify the need for further exploration of how individual values interact with brand communication.

3. Methodology

This study employed a structured individual survey approach, drawing from psychometric and perceptual measurement tools. The aim was to investigate how consumers' self-perception traits—agentive or communal—influence their evaluations of advertising content and related emotional reactions.

Participants and Recruitment

A total of 12 participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure variation in age and gender. The sample was divided into two age cohorts:

- **Group 1:** Aged 20–30
- **Group 2:** Aged 50–60

Each group consisted of three women and three men. Participants were recruited through academic networks and professional mailing lists. All individuals resided in Poland and provided informed consent prior to participation. The study was conducted in person in Gdańsk between 2022 and early 2023, and each session lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Procedure

The study was conducted in two consecutive stages:

Stage 1: Self-Perception Assessment

Participants completed the **Agency and Communion Orientation Scale** developed by Szlendak and Wojciszke (2010). The instrument includes 20 adjectives or statements rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The scores were summed to determine the dominance of either agentive or communal self-perception for each participant.

Stage 2: Advertising Evaluation

In the second stage, participants viewed four advertisements: two representing **brand-level messages** (Nike and Adidas), and two representing product-level promotions (Chevrolet SUV and Volkswagen ID.3). Each advertisement was selected based on its alignment with either communal or agentive values.

After viewing each ad, participants rated their emotional response, perceived message relevance, and alignment with personal values using a 7-point Likert scale. The advertisements were shown in randomized order to minimize bias.

Advertising Stimuli Description

The advertising materials used in the study were carefully selected for their clear orientation toward either communal or agentic values:

— Nike Advertisement

This video emphasized inclusivity, diversity, and social justice, aligning with **communal values**. It featured split-screen visuals showing individuals of different ages, skin colors, and genders engaging in shared activities. Participants described it as emotionally engaging and memorable: “The Nike ad is instantly memorable... connecting strangers across differences.”

— Adidas Advertisement

The Adidas commercial focused on resilience, personal struggle, and the pursuit of individual goals—hallmarks of **agentic values**. It presented athletes overcoming challenges and pushing their limits. As one participant noted: “It shows different sports and winning as a source of happiness.”

— Chevrolet SUV Advertisement

This ad promoted **communal themes** such as family bonds, safety, and togetherness. It featured scenes of family trips, relationships, and real-life emotional moments. Comments included: “This ad is very life-like. I see situations I’ve experienced too.” “It feels like a car that lives with the family.”

— Volkswagen ID.3 Electric Car Advertisement

Emphasizing **agentic themes** of independence and progress, this ad highlighted sleek design, advanced technology, and personal freedom. It was especially appreciated by participants who valued autonomy: “With such a car, you get from point A to B quickly and efficiently.” “It’s compact, aesthetically pleasing, and perfect for my lifestyle.”

These advertisements were all available in video format and presented in randomized order across participants.

Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to ethical guidelines established by the University of Gdańsk. Participants were fully informed about the nature and scope of the study, data were anonymized, and individuals retained the right to withdraw at any stage of the research without consequence.

4. Results

The main topic area in the presented results will be the culminating point of the entire survey, i.e. the examination of the mechanism of convergence of “self” with the presented product and brand.

The self-assessment made in the first part of the study, translated into the collected results indicating the dominant behavior of the respondent, was confronted with the perception of products and brands with a dominant communion or agential message. The “character” points were compared with the earned points with each of the ads viewed: community ads promoting the entire Nike brand (abbreviation “N”) and a specific Chevrolet product (abbreviation “C”) and causal advertisement for the Adidas brand (abbreviation “A”) and a Volkswagen brand product (abbreviation “V”). Below in Table 1, the results of each of respondents are presented in an overall perspective.

Table 1. Summarised results of the survey

	Gender	Age	Communion points	Agency points	N	A	C	V
1.	female	20–30	154	117	103	87	91	138
2.	male	20–30	137	114	96	68	93	92
3.	female	20–30	135	140	76	95	74	108
4.	male	20–30	157	105	98	70	121	116
5.	female	20–30	122	131	69	71	118	94
6.	male	20–30	148	92	75	69	39	76
7.	female	50–60	100	130	87	74	98	109
8.	male	50–60	110	106	82	76	114	78
9.	female	50–60	140	105	65	62	112	103
10.	male	50–60	141	142	105	100	55	86
11.	female	50–60	141	123	94	62	142	91
12.	male	50–60	156	129	92	84	125	114

Source: own elaboration based on the survey.

The above table allows us to see how the dominant character compares with the choices made during the survey.

The first ads shown involved the presentation of two brands in the same industry, Nike and Adidas. In 10 out of 12 participants, there was a clear convergence between their dominant personality traits and their brand preferences.

From the observations, it could be seen how well and positively received with the majority of respondents, the Nike ad was received, irrespective of the age range and gender of the study participants. What was repeatedly highlighted was inclusion, tolerance or community building: “the Nike ad is instantly memorable”, “the

very ingenious splitting of the screen into two parts and thus connecting different, strangers of different ages, skin colour, gender”, “Nike raised important social issues, it is immediately remembered”. Social issues, such a message is immediately memorable”.

The Adidas ad, statistically, was rated less favourably than its competitor, however, the two people whose behaviour was defined as more agentic rated more favourably the brand whose message was predominantly agentic and addressed issues such as pursuing one’s own goals, dreams, not giving up on them, the daily struggle for one’s own happiness and satisfaction. An in-depth opinion on this marketing message was, for example, “showing different sports and common intentions, winning that gives happiness”.

The next ads presented in the survey this time were ads with specific products. The first product ad was a Chevrolet SUV, and the second was a Volkswagen ID.3 electric car. Regarding product advertisements (Chevrolet SUV and Volkswagen ID.3), convergence was observed in 9 out of 12 participants, indicating that a majority aligned their product preferences with their dominant self-perception traits.

The Chevrolet ad was reached by the audience, who saw aspects touched upon, such as family ties, safety, relationships with friends, relationship with a partner. Quoting “this ad is very life-like, I see different situations where I was once too”, “a companion car in the life of the whole family”. The presented Volkswagen electric car evoked similar feelings and opinions of respondents, who perceived above-average functionality of the product: ‘with such a car you can park anywhere, it is very sleek and aesthetically pleasing’, ‘get from place A to place B quickly and perform your own duties more efficiently’.

An interesting phenomenon observed during the survey, was the opinions expressed on the car models presented. The respondent in the 20–30 age group, although demonstrating a higher level of agency over communion, prioritised practicality and the impact of daily life and the functionality of a given product when choosing a car – given that she is a mother, she needs to choose a car that meets her needs and her choice is a large and roomy SUV – “Volkswagen is definitely too small a car for my family”. The opposite is true for respondents also in the same age bracket, but showing a stronger commonality, with the difference that these are people who are not in a relationship and are not thinking of starting a family at the moment – “I certainly won’t park it anywhere, I prefer a much smaller and more agile car”. - they choose the causal Volkswagen, which they find much more practical and more suited to their needs.

To summarize, below is attached Table 2 with the collected data comparing all convergence phenomena at the brand, product and product and brand perception levels.

Table 2. Summarised results of the convergence

	With brand	With product	With brand and product
Convergence of the “self” of the respondents	10 Out of 12	9 Out of 12	7 Out of 12

Source: own elaboration based on the survey.

Out of the 12 participants surveyed, 10 exhibited a convergence between their dominant self-perception and their preference for one of the two presented brands. This suggests that the majority subconsciously selected a brand that aligned with their personality traits.

Similarly, 9 participants demonstrated a convergence between their self-perception and their choice of product.

The full convergence effect—where a participant identified as either communal or agentic and subsequently preferred both a brand and a product consistent with that orientation—was observed in 7 out of 12 cases.

These findings support the hypothesis that self-congruity plays a significant role in consumer perception. However, due to the limited sample size, the results should be treated as exploratory. Further research on a larger, more representative group is necessary to confirm these patterns and draw broader conclusions.

Self-Perception Alignment with Marketing Content

The findings revealed strong support for the hypothesis that self-congruity (the alignment of self-image with brand and product messages) significantly influenced consumer preferences.

- **Brand Preferences: 10 out of 12 participants** showed a strong alignment between their self-concept and their preference for the brand’s advertising. Communal participants gravitated toward the Nike and Chevrolet ads, which reflected inclusivity and social connection. In contrast, agentic participants favoured the Adidas and Volkswagen ads, which emphasised personal achievement and autonomy.
- **Product Preferences: 9 out of 12 participants** exhibited a preference for the product ads that aligned with their self-image. Those with communal traits showed a preference for Chevrolet’s family-oriented messaging, while those with agentic traits were more inclined toward Volkswagen’s forward-looking and technology-driven narrative.

Emotional Responses to Advertisements

The emotional responses were more intense when the marketing content was congruent with the participants’ self-image. Communal participants expressed feel-

ings of warmth and connection when exposed to communal ads, while agentic participants reported excitement and empowerment when engaging with agentic content.

Behavioural Tendencies

While purchase intention was not directly assessed in the study, participants often expressed emotional or practical preferences that imply behavioral alignment with their self-image. For example, communal participants reported greater identification with advertisements reflecting family and social values, whereas agentic participants favored messaging associated with achievement and autonomy. These tendencies, although not measured quantitatively as behavioral intent, indicate potential decision-making patterns driven by self-congruity.

5. Discussion

Comparison with Other Theories

The results from this study align with broader theories of **consumer identity** and **self-concept**. The **social comparison theory** (Festinger, 1954) and **social identity theory** (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggest that people make evaluations based on social comparisons and identification with groups. Consumers prefer brands and products that reflect their **social identity**, and advertising serves as a tool to express that identity. Our findings show how **agency and communion** serve as foundations for marketing decisions, based on deep feelings of belonging to a group or personal accomplishments. In this exploratory study, alignment between self-perception and brand messaging was observed in 10 out of 12 cases, and with product messaging in 9 out of 12 cases, confirming the relevance of self-congruity in shaping consumer impressions.

The Role of Emotions in Decision-Making

In the context of marketing, emotions play a crucial role in decision-making. According to Locke (2019), emotional engagement is moderated by the congruence between internal motivational states and external stimuli, such as brand narratives. As previous studies indicate, **emotional engagement** with a product or brand (e.g., a sense of **belonging to a community** in the case of Nike or a sense of **independence and strength** in the case of Volkswagen) leads to higher brand loyalty and purchase intention (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). The feelings associated with a product are largely the result of **alignment** with internal consumer values, which confirms our study's findings. Emotional connections triggered by marketing messages help build deeper consumer-brand relationships and contribute significantly to decision-making processes.

Cultural Context

However, this study did not account for the **cultural differences** that could influence the dominance of **agency** or **communion** in consumer behaviours. Cross and Hardin (2011) suggested that self-construal varies significantly across cultures, which may influence how individuals interpret marketing content. In **individualistic cultures** (e.g., the USA), advertisements that emphasise independence and personal success (agency) may prove more effective. In contrast, in **collectivist cultures** (e.g., Japan, India), marketing messages that focus on cooperation, empathy, and care for others (communion) might be more effective. Cultural differences in **self-construal** and the **importance of group vs. individual goals** can significantly influence how marketing messages are perceived and, ultimately, how they drive purchasing decisions.

6. Practical Implications

Application in Real Marketing Campaigns

Based on the results of this study, marketers should tailor their **advertising content** to the dominant self-concept of their target audience. For instance:

- **Nike** effectively uses values related to **communion** and **equality**, targeting consumers who prefer advertisements highlighting inclusivity and social solidarity.
- **Volkswagen**, on the other hand, promotes cars as tools for realising **personal dreams and goals**, appealing to consumers who favour agency, namely independence, control, and ambition.

Recommendations for Marketers

Marketers should implement **personalised campaigns** that consider the **agentic** and **communal** values in their advertising messages. For example, **pre-campaign research** is essential to understand which traits dominate within the target audience. As Witek (2011) emphasized, consumer behaviour in modern markets is shaped not only by product availability but also by the symbolic resonance of brand communication. By conducting **psychographic surveys** or **in-depth interviews**, companies can better align their communications with the self-concept of their consumers.

Moreover, marketers should use **psychological profiling** techniques to understand consumer behaviours and preferences, which will allow for more accurate targeting and better campaign performance.

Adapting Distribution Channels

It is also recommended to **adapt advertising distribution** depending on the **cultural** and **social** preferences of consumers. In **collectivist** cultures, campaigns

focusing on collaboration and social responsibility could be more effective, while in **individualistic** cultures, messages emphasising **personal achievements** and **independence** may resonate better.

Diversification of Communication

Communication should be **flexible** and **diverse**, depending on whether the brand wants to attract **agentic** or **communal** consumers. The use of appropriate **communication channels** (social media, influencers) can further amplify the message, making the advertisement more **personalised** and **emotionally engaging**.

7. Conclusion

This study provides preliminary evidence that **self-congruity**—specifically the alignment between advertising values and consumer self-perception—can meaningfully influence emotional responses and product or brand preferences. The structured individual survey highlighted a clear tendency for consumers to favour content that reflects their dominant traits: **communal or agentic**.

The results support the broader theoretical frameworks of self-concept and identity-based consumer behaviour, suggesting that marketing strategies may benefit from greater psychographic sensitivity. However, given the limited sample size and single-country context, findings should be interpreted cautiously. The study serves as an introductory investigation and encourages more robust empirical validation in future research.

8. Limitations and Future Research

While the study offers valuable preliminary insights into the role of self-congruity in consumer responses to advertising, it is not without limitations. The most notable constraint is the small sample size (12 participants), which limits the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, all respondents were based in Poland, and cultural homogeneity may have influenced perceptions of agency and communion.

Given the exploratory nature of this research, future studies should include larger and more diverse samples, incorporating participants from various demographic and cultural backgrounds. Further research could also adopt experimental or behavioral methods, such as click-through or choice tasks, to measure actual consumer behavior beyond self-reported preferences.

Moreover, expanding the range of advertising stimuli and including more varied product categories could deepen the understanding of how specific brand characteristics interact with consumer self-concept. Finally, longitudinal research could assess the stability of self-congruity effects over time and in repeated exposure scenarios.

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